



New York Field Office

Wetland Restoration on Private Land

Many acres of freshwater wetlands on private lands in New York State have been reclaimed and converted to other uses. Historically, wetlands in central and southeastern New York and in the Great Lakes Plain were drained and the fertile earth was planted with onions, cabbages, and other vegetables. Wetlands on countless dairy farms were drained by ditches and field tiles, then planted with pasture grass or grain. Canal systems, roads, marinas and docks, airports, homes and second homes have replaced wetlands across our landscape.

Although wetland loss continues, more wetlands are being restored today than ever before – especially on idled farmland. Private landowners are making this happen by participating in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Private landowners, recognizing the many benefits wetlands provide, have restored thousands of acres of freshwater wetlands on hundreds of sites in New York State since 1990. These restored wetlands range in size from one-quarter acre to hundreds of acres. Wetland reclamation has been replaced by wetland restoration!

Wetland restoration results from creating the environmental conditions necessary for the reestablishment of a wetland plant and animal community. Some sites require the construction of a dike, others require plugging a ditch. Yet, all approaches return water to the site either permanently or intermittently. Water and waterlogged soils stimulate the reappearance of wetland plants and organisms that begin returning the site to wetland habitat. Does wetland restoration work? You bet! Species variety and abundance on restored wetland sites are very comparable with natural wetlands.

Where You Fit In

When you join the Partners program, you join some 14,000 landowners nationwide who recognize the many benefits offered by this unique land form and have become land stewards by restoring over 300,000 acres of wetlands.

Wetlands improve water quality, recharge and discharge groundwater, retain and control storm water, and provide for biological diversity and open space.

Yet, landowners often have other, more personal reasons for wetland restoration. They may enjoy the sound of spring peepers, the glimpse of a great blue heron stalking its prey, or the thrill provided by a flock of ducks landing at dusk.

Wetland Restoration Successes

In 1989, the Town of Andover, in Allegany County, New York, wanted to restore 30 acres of wetlands used historically by town residents for fishing and bird watching. The cost was daunting – \$100,000, far beyond the means of the locality. The Andover Wetlands Concerned Citizens Group went to work raising money. Several local, state, and federal agencies donated time and money. The project was completed and recognized in 1995 by the Service's National Wetlands Conservation Awards Program.

In 1994, Barker Central School, Barker, NY, asked the Service to assess the restoration potential for 95 acres of school property. The site, within a mile of Lake Ontario, had been farmed for wheat and corn. The school administration was considering wetland restoration and wanted a nature trail for education and interpretation. The project, completed in 1996, restored wetland, grassland, and oak/savannah habitats to complement the riparian habitat on the site. The completed project incorporates a nature trail with loops to access each of the habitat types. Barker School students and community residents were involved from the beginning of the project. Students planned the trail, assisted in trail construction, designed a logo, and helped plant 8,000 trees. Community residents constructed the trail and donated equipment. The Town donated culverts and crushed stone. The site is now an outdoor science library that is wheelchair accessible, with an environmental education curricula written for grades K-12.

What About My Wetland?

Are there low areas on your property that hold water in the spring or held water prior to drainage? Are vegetation changes readily visible in your fields. Do patches of wetland plants such as cattail, sedges, or smartweeds occur in your

fields? If so, the changes are good that you may be able to restore a wetland on your property. Almost any landowner can become a Partner. The Service's Partners Program looks for project sites that will return the greatest natural benefits for the least cost. High property wetland restoration projects benefit non-game migratory birds, threatened or endangered species, or other declining species. Also, projects where landowners sign long-term agreements are preferred over projects of a shorter time frame. Landowners whose projects are selected sign an agreement with the Service. Stipulations include limited agricultural use and the right of Service staff to access the restored wetlands to verify compliance with the agreement. Public access is not required but can be allowed in accordance with applicable state laws at the landowner's discretion.

For further information, contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 3817 Luker Road, Cortland, NY 13045. (607) 753-9334.